

Why Fairtrade cocaine?

**A guide to a humane and sustainable
drug policy**



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1.1 Introduction

As the founder of the NGO Fairtrade Cocaine, it is my objective to research and enable humane and sustainable alternatives for the War on Drugs, with a focus on cocaine. Julian Quintero, the founder of Acción Técnica Social, gave me the pleasure to analyse the conditions that are necessary for a controlled market of cocaine, from a consuming country's perspective. As I'm based in the Netherlands, a country that is amongst Europe's top five with the highest prevalence of cocaine consumption, I have a suitable position to investigate the requirements of a regulated market of cocaine.

1.2 Interviewees

As an anthropologist, my knowledge is limited to include all the facets that must be considered to ensure a realistic and succeeding regulation policy. Therefore, I've interviewed seven specialists from different backgrounds, who shared their expertise on the subject. Amongst these specialists are historians, criminologists, journalists and a prevention employee of the national addiction centre. Hereby I would love to introduce a few of the interviewees:

Prof. Dr. Gemma Blok: social historian whose expertise is Alcohol and Drugs, connected to the Open University in Amsterdam

Bart de Koning: writer and research journalist who is specialized in crime and corruption

Dr. Ton Nabben: criminologist whose expertise is (recreational) drug consumption and drug policy, connected to University of Amsterdam

Thijs Roes: science journalist on drug policy reform

Stephen Snelders: historian who is specialized in the historical development of illegal drug markets, connected to Utrecht University

Damián Zaitch: criminologist who is specialized in organized crime, drug trafficking and drug policies in the Netherlands and Latin America, connected to Utrecht University

1.3 Research questions

The main objective of this study is to develop a regulated market of cocaine, that protects the wellbeing of (potential) consumers and the society. Meaning that it is designed to ensure the physical and social health of individuals, and on a societal level one that tackles crime and violence.

This document is divided into four sections, that are based on the following sub questions:

- What are the negative outcomes of prohibition of drugs?
- What are the positive outcomes of prohibition of drugs?
- Why do we need to end the prohibition policy?
- What are the conditions of a regulated market in order to protect the health and wellbeing of consumers and the society as a whole?

In order to develop a regulated market of cocaine, it is important to first motivate the necessity of why we need to change the prohibitionist policy. The first three chapters will thus focus on the practice of the current policy. The outcomes are based on how a prohibitionist policy affects the wellbeing of individual consumers and society as a whole. After this outline, I elaborate on a future policy, one that focuses on the health of individuals and prevents crime and violence.

2.1 What is the Dutch law regarding the production, trade, sale and consumption of cocaine?

Regarding drug consumption the Netherlands asserts the Opium Act. The Opium Act prohibits the possession, trade, sale, transport and manufacture of drugs covered by the Act. Consumption itself is not a crime. The Opium Act consists of two lists:

List 1: drugs with an unacceptable risk to health (hard drugs). For example: cocaine, XTC, amphetamine, LSD and heroin. List 2: drugs that are less harmful to health (soft drugs). For example: hashish and weed and hallucinogenic mushrooms.

Possession for both hard drugs and soft drugs for personal consumption is not traced and prosecuted. Drug use is therefore not punishable in the Netherlands. The maximum amount for personal use is less than 5 grams for soft drugs (hash or weed) and a maximum of half a gram for hard drugs (cocaine, speed etc.); one xtc pill and less than 5 ml GHB. If you are caught with a quantity of personal consumption, the police can confiscate this, but you will not be fined. The seizure can be registered, which means that your name is known to the police, but you will not have a criminal record. If you carry more than a user's amount, you can - depending on the amount you own - get a fine or even a prison sentence.

3. What are the negative outcomes of the prohibition of drugs?

“The consumption of drugs isn’t the state’s concern. Organized crime is what torments the government the most.”

“The biggest fear regarding drugs is organized crime.”

“It is the supply side that is currently causing the greatest panic.”

3.1 Crime

The illegal status of cocaine leaves the state powerless in having control

Prohibition leaves space for organized crime to flourish. When a government decides to prohibit drugs, they leave the production, the trade and the sales of drugs in the hands of illegal organizations. As soon as the trade is left in hands of crime, the government puts itself on the side-line. They have no say over the production, the transport, they can’t control which actors are in power and they cannot influence the money flows. On top of that, there is no control on deforestation or the processing of drug waste.

Prohibition disables the state to design laws in order to control the production chain. Like having a say in which actors are responsible for the trade and controlling the quality of the products. Prohibition creates the space for crime to control the complete market, including the agents that are involved, the distribution, the price and above all, the quality.

Repression pushes the trade in hands of violent criminals

In the Netherlands there was a time when law enforcement regarding the production of cannabis, was acted out more flexible. The production of cannabis was in hands of idealists and hippies, with a sincere and personal involvement. The idealists and hippies believed in the medicinal qualities of cannabis. As soon as the state acted out more and more repressive measures, the idealists withdrew themselves from the production and the trade. As soon as interception efforts and police raids increased, the idealists took a step back. As the demand for drugs remained, there was an opportunity for producers and traders who are less sensitive in obeying the law. In exchange, people that can deal with the psychological, physical and social pressure of illegal work, took over the production and trade of cannabis. Thus, repression has pushed the trade into the hands of people who are willing to use violence.

Apart from people who are involved in drug trade that are willing to use violence, there also people involved that are the victims of violence. As the trade is illegal, these victims cannot appeal to the judicial system. If agents are threatened physically, mentally and socially, they have no access to judicial protection. Violent actors within the chain are aware of this.

People involved in the business don’t have access to the judicial system

People who are involved in illegal business are not protected by law. If they’re physical, social or financial threatened, they have no access to any legal protection, or they experience a very high threshold to make use of their rights.

There is no control on the price

The initial objective of the prohibition policy is by dismantling the production side the price of drugs would rise. Europol has proven that only 1% of the total supply side is intercepted. As interception efforts had no influence in decreasing the quantity, the price of drugs hasn't lowered down. Simultaneously, the Dutch society has become wealthier and is able to spend more in recreational activities.

Prohibition puts governmental control offside, so the state cannot influence the price. Thus, they have no control in reducing the number of consumers.

Prohibition does not mean that a substance becomes more expensive. There has been a study by Caulkins and Reuter, which looks at the price development of cocaine and heroin over a longer period and they argue that heroin and cocaine actually become cheaper over the long term, despite their illegality. Which is the opposite of what the War on Drugs aimed to achieve.

At the same time, prices can become enormously high for the consumer. When a product is regulated, you can control markets and prevent cartels. This is impossible within an illegal drug market. For example, in the seventies the price of heroin suddenly rose to 400 guilders a gram. People who craved for heroin but could not afford it, experienced financial problems. This caused a huge increase in robberies.

Prohibition costs money and enriches criminal organizations

As the trade of drugs is a lucrative activity, the accumulated capital of criminal organizations is a great concern. As these money flows are not taxed, their income is even more profitable. As money flows cannot be taxed, the government also misses out on a lot of income. Simultaneously, the government invests half of its justice budget to fight drug related crime, which is more than 4,5 billion euros annually.

It causes environmental crime and ecological damage

If a substance is illegal, then you also get environmental crime. Ecological damage is a problem caused by the government. The state is not able to control drug waste and prevent deforestation. Producers of drugs are not able to process their drug waste. If production is legal, then the government is able to offer resources and specialists, that are able to process drug waste in a sustainable manner.

Repression is only a temporary/local solution

Prohibition and repression only result in a decrease of the flow of drugs on a short term. After two- or three-years imposing fear and interception efforts, the effect is over and the drug trade continues. Repression is not a sustainable system.

The drug war is an endless and unbeatable fight

After decades of prohibition, law enforcement is aware it is fighting an unbeatable fight when it comes to drug crime. Regarding bank and gas station robberies, the Dutch police has succeeded in dismantling burglars, by investing in security and prevention measures. When burglars are arrested, it doesn't inherently mean a new group of criminals will take in their place. When it comes to tackling drug crime however, the story remains endless. The trade of drugs is a market that involves demand and supply. There is an unlimited supply of drugs and there is an unsaturable demand for drugs. When the police arrests one segment of the production chain, others will take over this segment within a week. This makes the work of law enforcement effortless, unsatisfying and frustrating.

It did not lead to its initial objective: cocaine price did not increase (and we got wealthier)

Drugs are cheaper than ever before. Simultaneously, our wealth has increased.

It hasn't led to a decrease in consumption

When a substance is illegal, it doesn't mean the substance is not being consumed. We have seen where prohibition has led to. Since prohibition drug use has only increased. Criminalization does not have the effect of deterring people from using it. Illegality does not prevent people from using drugs.

Its availability has grown and diversified, partly due technology

The development of technology enabled to diversify the distribution of drugs. There is no need to sell drugs in the streets. Thanks to mobile phones and internet, drugs can be delivered at your house. The access to drugs is made easier. The pizza model: you're one phone call away from a delivery.

The distribution of drugs also goes through social networks. Buyers of drugs often distribute it among their friends.

There is also the dark web. Due to the illegality and the rise of the internet new systems of distribution are being created. Drugs can also be ordered online.

The combat and interception efforts cost the government a lot of (wasted) money

Tackling drug crime costs about 4,5 billion euros of tax money annually. And it only is able to intercept 1% of the total amount of drugs. As supply and demand has not decreased, the investments have no effect.

3.1 Health issues

There is no possibility in controlling the quality of drugs

There is no possibility in controlling the quality of drugs when drugs are illegal substances. As a result, the consumer is surrendered to the uncontrollable black market. There is no control if the producers are qualified, nor its dose. Cocaine is often combined with other substances, with for example levamisole.

Due to its illegal status the availability or selling of drugs are acted out on hidden and dangerous locations. These locations do not safeguard the physical and social wellbeing of consumers. Hidden places also increase the stigma of using drugs. So, the health of the consumer is not guaranteed.

Its illegal status generates stigma on people who use drugs

There's an artificial, or social constructed, distinction between what drugs are considered accepted and not accepted. Looking at the legal status of alcohol and cigarettes, this distinction is not based on their levels of harm. When consuming illegal drugs, one is perceived as a criminal or an outlaw. Stigmatization has a lot of negative impact on people's lives. Apart from the physical risk of not knowing what you consume, there is to social risk of being excluded if your social environment is in some way disapproving your use. So, the illegal status of a drug has social effects as well.

Apart from the social stigma, the use of drugs has also judicial consequences. There is a risk of being caught and therefore getting into legal problems. For some it may entail they will lose their job, for example in the military, transport employees or flight attendants.

Stigma restrains people from seeking help

On an individual level the social stigma generates shame and guilt. Therefore, when people experience negative consequences of their substance use, the shame and guilt restrain people from sharing their problems or from seeking help. A person who has problems with his alcohol use, is already having trouble finding compassion within their social network. Let alone someone who is concerned about his use of illegal substances.

3.3 Racism/ethnic profiling

Its illegal status has racist origins and outcomes and not health-based objectives

The War on Drugs started a century ago in the USA, when opium was used to criminalize Chinese migrants and cocaine and heroin were used to criminalize young black men. In the seventies the government needed an excuse to dismantle the civil rights movement and left-wing anti-Vietnam war civilians, as they were threatening the government's position. Under the lead of president Nixon the government declared the War on Drugs.

Looking at the Dutch culture, white people drugs like cigarettes and alcohol are legalized and socially accepted. To produce heroin and hash, you need to get after Chinese, Turkish and Moroccan. Our entire ethnic preference is ingrained in our drug policies.

Its illegal status generates ethnic profiling by law enforcement

The framework of what is considered a criminal act is racist. The money laundering white banker is perceived as innocent, while the migrant dealer is considered a criminal. The more visible ethnic minorities end up imprisoned and the money laundering banker gets away with a fine.

4. What are the positive outcomes of the prohibition of drugs?

Arguments against regulation of cocaine

**Prohibition scares people from consuming it -
but it makes consumption more dangerous**

Illegality has a certain restraining effect on using drugs. That would meet the health of the population because fewer people use it. A disadvantage of regulating could be that the amount of people that it is going to use cocaine becomes larger. Simultaneously, the quality of the product cannot be controlled. This in turn, has a more dangerous effect on the health of consumers. If illegal substances would become legal, the prevalence of consumption might increase, but their products would be safer.

If alcohol for example would be illegal, a consumer cannot know if the permillage is either 20% or 80%. As alcohol is a legal drug, you can be sure of the fact that your beverage is promised to be 40%, the permillage truly is 40%.

Cocaine is relatively addictive

Cocaine directly releases dopamine. This makes cocaine a relatively high addictive substance.

Drug crime will be replaced by other forms of crime (like human trade)

The well-known argument against legalization is that drug crime will shift to control another market.

Consumers can get cocaine anyway (high availability of cocaine in illegal status)

From a consumer's perspective legalizing cocaine would not be that beneficial. In its illegal status, consumers can get drugs easy and the quality is relatively satisfying. There are no perceived obstacles in accessing drugs, as their availability is widespread. Due to its illegal status consumers remain anonymous. There is a common interest between the seller and the buyer: they give each other coverage by maintaining an anonymous relationship. When legalizing cocaine, the buying of drugs can be registered for example. This puts the privacy of people at stake.

5. Why do we need to regulate the market of cocaine?

5.1 To end violence and crime

“The biggest misconception of our fear for drugs is that the consumption of drugs is the biggest problem. But it is drug crime -which is caused by the illegal status- that is society’s biggest concern.”

To end violence and crime and end the War on Drugs

The main reason to regulate drugs is to end violence and crime. The trade of drugs is very violent. Regulating drugs decreases the level of human harm, human violence and homicides. They are all connected with drug trade because of their illegal status. The homicide rate will drop drastically, especially in production and transit countries too.

It puts human rights as a priority, not the stopping of flow of drugs

From the perspective of humanity, we need to regulate drugs to end the War on Drugs. When the trade of drugs is regulated, human rights will be less violated. Illegalization is the worst form of policy and it is not a sustainable system. It is more important to safeguard human rights, than decrease the flow of drugs.

The biggest threat for crime is to take away their business

The biggest threat for crime is to legalize their products. If a consumer is offered a product that guarantees a good quality and has a fair and sustainable production chain, it will take away a large number of customers on the illegal side. You make it much harder for crime by offering a safe and fair-trade alternative. This is what crime is most afraid of. Regulating drugs means dismantling terrorist groups such as the Taliban and the Farc. Their income relies on the trade of drugs. By taking away their income, it means they are less capable in buying weapons and building up military forces. These are all extra income and power they receive.

Regulation allows law enforcement to focus on effective and satisfying work

The Dutch police has a clear-up rate of 8% as it focuses on the unbeatable drug crime. Most of the crime is not even treated. Drug criminals that are arrested, are replaced by new ones.

If drugs are being put in state control, law enforcement can focus on crime that can be solved. So that police can do work that actually can be solved and have a satisfying job.

5.2 To take back control:

It allows governments to have control over the trade, to create laws

If you want to offer a legal version of cocaine, that means that the government can do something that the government cannot do now and that is regulating the supply side. Through regulation, the government is able to control the substance. It enables them to determine how and where cocaine can be offered and produced. The state can obligate the recreational-pharmaceutical industry to attach a prescription and a warning sign on the products. It empowers the state to control the production, the distribution and the sales. By regulating drugs, the government can make choices to minimize the risks.

It allows the trade to involve less distribution channels

When regulating the production chain, it means you can leave aside many distribution segments. You only need a coca plantation, a manufacturer to convert it into cocaine, a quality check, transport and a selling point. When a substance is illegal, it needs a lot of distribution channels as the direct route is ripe for interception. A legal substance does not need to circumnavigate across several continents. This means that less people and organizations are involved, which results in a less widespread amount of crime across the world.

It allows governments to have control over the price

When the trade is left in the hands of crime, the state can not influence the price. Coming back on the argument above, a regulation market does not need a lot of distribution channels. This allows the substance to be very cheap. Meaning that it creates the opportunity to acquire taxes over drugs, which can be invested in for example quality control and education.

It allows governments to get more income out of taxing drugs

The trade of drugs is pure capitalism. The only objective of the business is making profit. There are no taxes. In a legal market, people will buy legal products, the money of the illegal business flows into the legal market.

5.3 To ensure healthy/quality of drugs

To offer drugs that has quality and is not dangerous

The need to control the market is to ensure that consumers have access to a substance of which the quality is controlled. If you want to protect consumers from drugs, you need to allow them to have access to a product that is produced by specialists, not by criminal actors whose main objective is to earn money.

To enable research on the effects of drug use

In the current prohibitionist state of drugs, it is less feasible to conduct research on the risks and the right dosage of drugs. When a substance is illegal, scientific research becomes more complicated. There are fewer companies that are willing to invest. A regulation market makes space for more research, which is in favour of the health of the consumer.

To control the minimum age of users of drugs

Research has shown that drug use is risky for minors. Brain studies have proven that the younger you start using substances, it affects brain development and it may lead to an increase of use. This applies to cigarettes and other substances. We know that among young people the classic structure is smoking, drinking, followed by other substances. There are age limits for legal drugs, but not for illegal drugs.

To destigmatize users of drugs

and to make people who use drugs feel less ashamed of seeking help

As the production chain is illegal, the sales of drugs must be acted out in private and underground settings. When the distribution is practiced in legal settings, it allows consumers to feel less ashamed of their consumption. It is important that people who use drugs feel comfortable to speak out if they feel they have problems with their use.

To enable a sustainable and fair-trade cultivation and production of drugs

When the trade of a substance is in hands of the state, the state can control the production and distribution. Meaning that it can safeguard an organic cultivation, a sustainable production and a fair-trade distribution. It can prevent ecological damage and secure that people who are involved earn a fair income, and above all, have access to the judicial system.

Why regulate: to deprive crime of income

The income derived from drugs will shift from criminal organizations to the state. Every amount of cocaine that is in hands of the state is a loss of income for crime.

To offer a fair-trade alternative for users of drugs

At the current prohibitionist policy people who consume drugs don't have a fair-trade and sustainable alternative. Consumers don't have a choice. There is only an illegal supply, in which violence, corruption and ecological damage is involved. Like other legal substances, drugs need an alternative as well.

The drug war is originated by racist objectives, not pragmatic and humanistic ones

The War on Drugs is originated in a time of racial oppression. The protection of the health of individuals was not the main objective in starting the drug war. We are employing a war that was imposed by the USA during a racist and imperialist era.

The combating and detection of drugs costs a lot of tax money

Effortless investigation and interception efforts cost a lot of tax money.

Regulation allows control over drug waste

When the state is in control of the production, it is able to process drug waste in an ecological and sustainable manner.

Why prohibiting a product in which the demand is unsaturable?

If prohibition and repression did not decrease the consumption of cocaine, why there is a need to deny the existence of the demand? In Amsterdam the liquidations and the arms trade are all related to drug crime. Police is the largest organization in the Netherlands, which means that 30,000 people are working full-time to prevent a substance that other people would really like to use.

The majority of users live a responsible life

10-20% of cocaine users experience health and social risks of their consumption, part of this prevalence is due to its stigma, which keeps people away from seeking help. The majority of people who use cocaine can live a responsible life. The use of drugs can be combined with a responsible lifestyle. Or eventually, after the age of 34, when the prevalence decreases, people focus on their job and/or their family.

It's people's right to self-determination/autonomy

It is perceived as a fundamental right to have autonomy over your body. Prohibiting substances goes against self-determination. People have the right to be the boss in their own brain and over their own body. When drugs are illegal, people are forced to employ their right to self-determination in using uncontrolled substances.

6. What are the conditions of a regulated market that protects the health and wellbeing of consumers as well as society?

6.1 Before transferring to a regulated market of cocaine...

There should be a shift in law enforcement:

Harm reduction in three levels: production, trade and consumption

Harm reduction must be the main focus of drug policies. This means that harm reduction has to be implemented at all three levels: at the level of production, traffic and consumption. It involves less criminalization of users, traffickers and producers, by employing less use of traditional justice system instruments, like prisons and police, and more use of other institutions of the state. Organizations that are equipped to improve and safeguard physical and mental wellbeing of the people involved.

Police focuses on decreasing violence rather than the interception of drugs

The police should only intervene in situations and networks where there is a high level of violence connected with the business. Traffickers need to be decriminalized, as they are the most susceptible for violence. The ones who use violence should be criminalized. As they are offenders their wellbeing is being less acknowledged. Criminalization of traffickers has proven not to deter people from trafficking. The incentive for trafficking is money. So, punishment does not have any effect. There needs to be tolerance to people in the production chain who are not violent.

The paradigm must change from policing drugs towards policing violence. The prevention of violence is more important than the stopping of drugs. Violence in all its forms: physical, psychological and gendered violence. The ones that need to be targeted are the violent actors in the production chain. Violent entrepreneurs cannot be accepted.

Change the focus from the vulnerable to the powerful segments of trade

The scope has to change from vulnerable actors to powerful actors. The more powerful, the more violent. Therefore, there needs to be made a distinction between the powerful and the vulnerable. Somebody who is caught with one or two kilos of cocaine in an airport is a vulnerable actor. The head of a criminal organization is the powerful one.

Ensure public spaces are drug free and allow drug trade spaces

Society does not like to be confronted with drug dealing in public spaces. People are sensitive for the visibility of drug dealing. There is a low acceptance for visual drug dealing. It's not about the drug, but it's about the infringement of public space. Civilians have their right for a decent public space. Therefore, it should not be allowed that drug business is enacted in public spaces. People who deal in places like parcs and playgrounds, should be removed. Create spaces where people can buy and sell drugs.

6.2 Cultural change:

Inform about the immense damage of the drug war

The society has to be aware of the damaging consequences of the repressive and prohibitionist policy. Inform about the violence, its racist origin and prevailing ethnic profiling, the lack of control and the risks for consumers when substances are illegal.

Inform objective/neutral/scientific about the risks of cocaine use

There is a misconception on the danger of legal and illegal drugs. About 20.000 people die annually on smoking cigarettes; a substance that is legal. Society must be informed in a neutral and objective manner about the risks of each drug, neutrally, objective and based on science.

In the same time, people have to be informed about the risks of cocaine.

Create acceptance towards recreational drug use

In the Dutch society, the idea of using illegal drugs for recreational purposes is not accepted. It is hard to openly talk about the benefits people experience from illegal substances. For many that is the experience, but there is a taboo on positively expressing it.

There are examples of animals who seek psychoactive experiences. For example, dolphins playing with puffer fish and elephants eating fruit that makes them a little bit drunk. This seek for a rush or a psychoactive experience is what makes us human. Some people find it through extreme sports, like climbing. But for some they prefer to use a substance to enhance this feeling. There must be a cultural acceptance for the human desire for a psychoactive experience.

The use of drugs should be destigmatized

Don't identify people who use drugs with their consumption. They are normal people. Don't talk about 'drug users'. Talk about 'people who use drugs'.

Employ neutral language around drug use and damage

Media like to employ sensational terms like 'drugs mafia' and the Netherlands being a 'narco state'. Comparisons are made with the Mexican situation. Mafia is a very complex term that evokes all kinds of associations. These sensationalized images deter a neutral discussion. In our language and interaction, partly through media, we should employ objective terminology about drug use and damage.

Accept there is no perfect solution

Regulation will not be the solution against all the problems. Regulation entails taking control of the quality and over the trade. This doesn't mean the illegal market will just disappear. We should accept that the problem cannot be solved by the government entirely. There will still be people who experience problematic use of substances and there still will be space for criminal organizations. But when looking at how we solved a lot of heroin related problems through harm reduction measures, there are many opportunities for regulating cocaine (and other illegal substances). It is important to constantly reflect and adjust the rules in order to protect people who use drugs and the society from crime.

Research based on historical models which regulation model is evidence based best practice

The government should conduct a study based on historical models and analyse which measurements had positive or negative outcomes.

6.3 Then there is regulation...

Focus on harm reduction

Harm reduction was the focus on treating the heroin epidemic. Instead of arresting and prosecuting people who use heroin, the Dutch government focused on a medical model. Now we have the healthiest junkies in the world. How can we best protect the health of people who use drugs? By not leaving them to an illegal market.

Control the quality of drugs

There needs to be an authority that controls the quality of drugs. A pharmaceutical Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.

Do not promote drug use:

Do not allow marketing in promoting the use of cocaine

We have to learn from our experiences with legal drugs like tobacco and alcohol. For decades these products have been available in supermarkets and promoted through commercials. As a result, the availability and its publicity has embedded the use of it in our lifestyles. Now, as the health and social risks have proven to be very high, it is harder to introduce limitations in the consumption.

From a health and prevention perspective, risky substances should not be marketed and promoted. Especially regarding cocaine, as cocaine has a higher possibility of dependency. It is very undesirable that the use of cocaine is in any way being promoted, either by commercials or either by its availability. So, no widespread stores and no advertising.

Don't make the consumption of cocaine easily accessible

The fact that the prevalence of cocaine consumption, compared to alcohol, is low, is due to the fact that the use of cocaine is not dominantly incorporated in the lifestyle of Dutch people, as alcohol is. People are confronted with the availability of alcohol on every corner of the street, by the presence of bars and commercials. There are barely any social events without alcohol. We must learn from this aspect when implementing a regulation market for cocaine. The use of cocaine should not be normalized in society, not like has happened with the consumption of alcohol. Now it is quite hard to smoke in public spaces. There are less and less spaces where you can smoke. Above all, shame is quite an aspect that helps people smoke less. This should also be applied to people who use cocaine.

The availability of cocaine should therefore not be visible. Simultaneously, it should be accessible enough in order to tackle the illegal market.

Simultaneously, the moment people desire cocaine can be often based on an impulsive moment, like when they want to prolong their night, drinking in a bar. As the combination alcohol and cocaine is a risky one, it would not be desirable selling cocaine in outlets where alcohol is being sold. The interaction between alcohol and cocaine allows an increase of mental dependence on one of the two. One might say "I will not use tonight", but after two beers one feels less under control and is easier attracted to cocaine.

Because of this symbiotic relationship, it is recommendable that people who have an addiction to cocaine, needs to stop drinking alcohol as well.

There must be a balance between the visibility and the availability to prevent illegal sales and protect healthcare.

When looking at the distribution of alcohol in Sweden, the availability of alcohol is very limited. It is less accessible, which makes Swedish people relatively drink less. You can only buy alcohol in limited places and liquor stores are open until 6pm. We can look at similar models like that: allowing a limited number of recreational pharmacies with a certain closing time.

The policy development on tobacco could also be inspiring. There are only a few public spaces in where you can smoke. There are less and less smoking areas. Consequently, the shame put on smoking keeps people away from smoking.

Within this model there needs to be attention for the tipping point: that illicit trade will focus on the people under the age of 18 for example.

Do not judge/stigmatize people who use drugs

We should talk about people who use drugs, instead of drug users.

Also, when a person buys drugs, it must remain private. Their privacy must be protected. People who use drugs should not be persecuted or limited in applying for a job.

Educate neutral and objective about the risks of drug use

It is important to inform objectively about the risks of consuming cocaine. In this information it is important to include a consumer's own vulnerability. There is a misconception on alcohol being less dangerous than illegal drugs. This misconception should be re-educated, with objective information about the risks of different drugs.

Build an infrastructure for taking care of excessive use

The Dutch government has implemented many rules and developed an infrastructure on preventing accidents regarding the use of alcohol. In 2013, 97% of all drug related deaths are caused by the legal substances alcohol and tobacco. We could do the same with illegal drugs. Develop rules, organizations and an infrastructure to prevent accidents of excessive use. Again: harm reduction first.

6.4 A non-profit market

Do not allow companies to profit from the selling of cocaine

Any type of regulation should imply state presence or state regulation. The market is not suited for regulation. Businesses are less transparent, more capable of keeping secrets. They are powerful and they can influence people, markets and small companies. Their aim is to sell their products, this objective is especially dangerous with drugs.

If you are going to make a business model for multinationals, then they will try to sell as many to people as possible. In that case it could end up like the spread of Oxycontin in the USA. Then every doctor will receive a gift if he prescribes such a pill. So the market should not be about making profit. Certainly not with the risky drugs, like cocaine. With weed and pills, if you are going to legalize it you can also make it lighter by adding less THC for example. But with coke? At first a heavy role for the government.

The state must have quality controls, to label, to certificate and maybe even to produce drugs.

Ensure there are as few as possible distribution channels (to control and benefit from the price)

It is important to maintain as few as possible distribution channels in the production chain. The risk of having too many is creating fragmentation.

When maintaining as few as possible chains in the production chain, it is easier to make profit and to maintain control. It allows people to make profit. It would be great to develop fair trade coke that producers get the benefits of cocaine, they produce good cocaine, have certification from the state and sell almost directly to the users. The segments that should be involved in the legal market are limited to the cultivators, the manufacturers, the chemical providers, transport, pharmaceutical distributors and the consumers.

6.5 Balancing between barriers and availability

Create barriers, to demonstrate it is a risky product

You have to set a threshold, but that threshold must be feasible. Because if that threshold is no longer feasible, you exclude people which enables opportunities for the illicit market. Within a legalized system it is all about raising barriers that are feasible. The same is already happening with alcohol, in which only 18+ are allowed to drink alcohol. This barrier demonstrates that drugs are risky. This should be applied to drugs as well.

Condition: keep the threshold high to keep consumption low

There has to be a different strategy for each drug. What works well with smoking is making it simply unattractive. Not by forbidding it, but by making smoking areas unappealing.

Do not create too high barriers, as it will be in favour of the illicit market. If history teaches something, it is that any form of regulation, if you do it fairly strictly, also entails smuggling. That is a very difficult issue. In India the Dutch government had opium control. They produced smoke opium. If you were a registered user you could buy state opium. But the distribution forms became more and more tightened. Then a smuggling system was developed for the people without a pass. It would be a safe, pleasant option to use a pass system but you should not raise high thresholds because you create space for illegal trade. History teaches us that if you create a strict regulation system, it is very difficult to avoid the smuggling trade around it.

Don't make it more expensive than the illegal market

Otherwise you maintain an illegal market.

Don't make it too cheap, as it will attract consumption

To raise the threshold for consumption.

6.6 The development of recreational pharmacies:

Start small, end big (the Overton effect)

Apply the Overton Window: a spectrum of ideas that the general public accepts. You can set up such a system within four years. By exposing something so extreme and keep continuing to talk about this extreme topic, you stretch the extreme into normal.

The strategy would be: start small and end big. Don't start with legalizing heroin for example. Start with legalizing weed, then psychoactive substances and after that cocaine. First inform about the benefits of consuming and producing MDMA in a legal way. The risks of consuming MDMA are low, as

it is relatively not addictive. Legalizing MDMA would prevent drugs dumping and crime. The advantages of legalizing MDMA is easy to talk about.

Start strict and later on stretch it up. When legalizing MDMA you could first sell it only on Friday afternoons for example. When starting strict or limited, it is easier to get conservative parties on your side.

Open shops that sell coca products

We should open shops and allow cafés to sell coca products. We would love to be able to consume coca products, like in coca shops or cafés. If skiing is allowed, we should permit coca shops. At first, we should consider the quantity of import, because we should prevent it from converting it into cocaine.

An informative, recreational pharmacy, with specialist pharmacists

Cocaine will be sold in an informative, recreational pharmacy, in which trained staff give customers neutral and objective information on the risks. It could be similar to the Dutch smart shop, but less hippie and more medical.

There should be a distinction made on its evidence-based danger. Alcohol should be sold in special liquor stores, tobacco only at tobacconists and not at gas stations and supermarkets, cannabis at coffee shops, magic mushrooms at smart shops. That you are going to stretch the pharmacy concept. Later on, cocaine will be added in the pharmacy, preferably a separate pharmacy.

Like prescribed medication, drugs should have extended instructions included. On the package the dosage and milligram must be included. The government gets more work, but it can have influence on the quality of the product and the wellbeing of people who consume cocaine.

The interior of the recreational pharmacy should be neutral/objective (not too attractive, and exposing that it's about risky products)

In the Netherlands it is possible to test your drugs, on scheduled times in about 25 locations throughout the country. In the past, the test service in Amsterdam used to be located in a cozy environment, a little bit alternative and festive. Now they've moved to a more clinical setting. The clinical setting makes people realize that drugs is something to be taken seriously. It emphasizes that taking drugs is something risky and that it is not something that should be consumed carefree and light-hearted.

Therefore, a recreational pharmacy should not be too jolly and more neutral. A pharmacy has the interior of not having judgements to any diseases or other forms of exclusion. A pharmacy is there to provide information. It shows that professionals are working there to give you objective consults and are there to project your health.

On the other side, it should not be too clinical. People who desire recreational drugs are different from people who really need medication for physical complaints. So, the Dutch smart shop can have an upgrade: less hippie and more medical.

Separate pharmacies for psychoactive drugs and stimulants

In the Netherlands one can buy cannabis in a coffeeshop. The good aspect of making distinctions between soft and hard drugs is that these markets are separate. When regulating all drugs, it will be good to maintain this separation. If somebody would go to a pharmacy to buy the more innocent mushroom, one can get seduced by buying the riskier drug cocaine. Therefore, it is good to develop distinct pharmacies: one for psychedelics, like mushrooms and LSD, and one for stimulants, like amphetamines (speed) and cocaine.

The same accounts for alcohol and tobacco. They should not be sold in supermarkets, amongst daily groceries like fruit and vegetables. They need their own shops as well.

Offer fewer addictive forms of cocaine, like cocaine pills

A very large part of the risks and problems with cocaine is also in the way it is used: many people use it through their nose. By sniffing cocaine, the time between taking cocaine and influencing your dopamine system is shorter. The shorter the time, the stronger the reward systems works. When the effect is faster achieved, the substance becomes more addictive. Which is why smoking is the most addictive substance.

Within a regulated market it is possible to offer fewer addictive forms of cocaine. Cocaine pills for example. When taking cocaine orally, it can take an hour before you feel any effect. This would decrease the risk of addiction.

6.7 Responsibility of consumers/maintain their health

Like a driver's licence, consumers need to demonstrate their theoretical knowledge on the risks

People who want to buy drugs, should legitimate their responsible use of drugs. Like having a driver's license or a firearm certificate, you need to prove that you are aware you're consuming a substance that involves risks. A certificate for psychoactive substances. Like a diving licence.

Before obtaining for a certificate for psychoactive substances you need to do a test that demonstrates your knowledge on dosing and harm reduction measures. Possibly you need to educate yourself on the effects of dopamine levels and the use of cocaine.

Again, it is important to balance between a low and a high threshold. You don't want a high threshold because it allows space for the illegal market. But when threshold is too low, the risks of drugs are not taken seriously. You can offer such a test and certificate for example for about 20 to 25 euros.

If there is a taboo on drug use, the use of drugs should be remained anonymous

The problem with a certificate is that all your data is being registered. A lot of people who use drugs don't want their use being exposed, for example to their insurances and employers. If drug use will continue to be a taboo, it could affect a person's future and safety. Thijs Roes thinks blockchain could guarantee anonymous buying of drugs. In this system the registration of your certificate and your purchases will remain registered anonymously.

Allow producers and distributors to open a bank account (to prevent corruption)

It is important that legal producers and distributors are able open a bank account. If the production side does not have access to a bank and these entities will be refused, then they will be stuck with cash and you cannot get tax from it. The banks must cooperate with the production chain. Otherwise there will be corruption.

Protect producers, distributors and pharmacists from rip deals or raids

Legal producers and distributors are, just like other entrepreneurs, entitled to protection. Especially during the transition from a prohibition to a regulated market, producers and distributors might be dealing with rip deals and raids. They have the right to protect themselves.

6.8 A global level:

Allow 4 tons of cocaine a year from for example Colombia

The problem with the production of cocaine, is that the resource for cocaine, coca leaves, grows elsewhere. Therefore, we depend on other countries. In order to fulfil the demand of cocaine in the Netherlands we need a quantity of 4 or 5 tons a year, which accounts for 4 cubic meters. This can be provided directly from a producing country. We only need an agreement with a producing country, who can directly transit to the Netherlands. This means that it will cut out all the transit countries and their violent segments.

Ally with other nations, like Uruguay and Canada, Colombia

We don't have to time to wait until every country unanimously agrees on regulating cocaine. Countries like the Philippines, Russia and Iran employ very repressive measures when it comes to the production and consumption of drugs. We should create alliances with other likeminded countries, like Canada. If we are enabling a legal market, Canada would be allowed to buy cocaine from us. We can prevent illegal distribution and smuggling by boat and plane. We can arrange it directly through customs with consignment notes.

6.9 Educational matters:

Do not educate pupils before the age of 18 (as they are open to experiment)

Education and informing about the risks of drugs is an important element of harm reduction. It prevents risky consumption; it enables an open discussion on drug consumption and destigmatizes drug use.

Out of experience from Jellinek, it is not effective to educate on risks of drug use amongst people under the age of 18. It has proven to have an adverse effect. When informing objectively about the positive and negative effects, they only hear the positive outcomes. This makes them curious. At this age adolescents are open to experiment, but it is precisely at this age that they are susceptible to long-term consequences when using drugs, like affecting brain development.

Train [potential] users to be resilient if they don't want to use drugs

One important element of drugs education is to be resilient, to be capable of saying no and to cope with peer pressure. "Do I really want this myself" It is important to make individual choices. This is an important aspect of harm reduction.

Allow test services for the illegal market

When there is a regulated market and there is still an active illegal market, it is important to allow test services. We must maintain harm reduction for people who buy drugs in the illicit market. If there is an illegal market, test services need to be available.

7. Poll: Would you buy more cocaine if it would be legal?

Changing Perspectives is an active community page for and by people who inform about the consumption of drugs. The focus is to share experiences of using drugs and to inform neutrally about the risks. It has about 7.000 members.

We developed a poll in which we asked the followers of the community the following:

“Imagine there is a pharmacy where you can buy cocaine legally. Would you use cocaine more often?”

These were the results:

- 👤 308 respondents answered ‘no’
 - 👤 12 respondents answered ‘yes’
 - 👤 18 respondents answered ‘yes, if it would be cheaper’
 - 👤 4 respondents answered ‘yes, if the quality is good’
-
- 👤 90% answered ‘no’
 - 👤 10% answered ‘yes’

Some comments made by the respondents:

“To be fair, if it would be 5 euros per gram, then I’d might get myself into trouble.”

“I’ve never used cocaine because it is being produced by violent cartels. If it would be fair trade, I would like to try cocaine.”

“If cocaine would be cheaper, I would definitely consume it more often.”

“I wouldn’t consume it more often, but it will be easier to get access to cocaine.”

“When cocaine would be legal, I would like to try it. At the moment I’m not using cocaine because of its damaging production chain. So if it would be controlled, I will try it.”

“I wouldn’t use more often, I’d might use less.”